

Topic Eleven – Remote Coaching



Coaching, Evaluating and Delivering Constructive Feedback – Learning Series

We are pleased to bring you **“Remote Coaching;”** the eleventh in a series of communications that discuss the value that coaching brings to your management practice and team leadership. The content presented will provide an overview of challenges presented by remote coaching, and strategies to mitigate those challenges. In addition to this message, this topic includes a job aid to help you effectively provide feedback to remote coaches. During the call we will discuss the challenges of remote coaching and share strategies for managing and coaching remote employees.

To reference previous topics, please click on the Coaching Series Home link located in the Quick Links section of this web page.

Thanks for all you do.

Overview: Remote Coaching

Remote coaching occurs when a manager/supervisor and employee do not share the same physical workspace, either permanently or temporarily. To effectively provide feedback to remote employees, it is important to consider the challenges inherent to the situation.

When providing feedback remotely, you and your employee are typically speaking by phone. When connecting by phone, there are two key variables that shift:

- Lack of body language to read and respond to
- Increased potential for distraction

When you're not able to see your employee, read and respond to his or her actions or reactions, you lose much of the nonverbal communication managers/supervisors often use to understand what's not being said. It will require more effort on your part to make your employee comfortable being honest with you to manage this complexity.

When your employee is not able to see you, you may be tempted to multitask and check email while meeting with him or her. It's critical to give your full focus and attention to your employee and the coaching conversation at hand.

Remember that each coaching conversation is an opportunity to build and strengthen your relationship with

your employee. Reinforce your commitment to his or her performance and professional development by being engaged and attentive and mindful of the perils of remote coaching.

Benefits of Remote Coaching

When done well, remote coaching can have the following benefits:

- Provides remote employees with the feedback they need to continue their performance and professional development
- Demonstrates the manager/supervisor's commitment to his or her employee's performance and professional development
- Builds and strengthens the coaching relationship

Keys to Remote Coaching

Use the guidelines below to effectively provide feedback when coaching remotely:

Ask more questions: Without the easy interpretation of someone's expression or physical stance to help you, it is likely that you will have to ask more questions than you may be accustomed to asking during the coaching conversation. **Use open-ended questions** often as with any other coaching situation, but it is likely that you will also need to **ask many more confirming questions** to make sure that your understanding of the 'facts' of the situation are in line with the employee's experience.

Managing silence: When you are having a conversation, there are often natural silences which occur to allow one or the other person to absorb what has been stated and prepare to continue with the conversation. Those silences can be easy to tolerate when you are face to face, because often you can tell by looking at someone whether they are engaged and processing or just waiting for you to say something in response. But in a remote coaching experience, often those silences can feel very long and uncomfortable because you do not have the visual cues to assure you that the silence is acceptable for both people. You can overcome this hurdle in two ways. First, you can **frequently check in with the employee**, even asking if they need a minute to think before you continue, if that seems appropriate. And you can also train yourself to **allow space for silence within the coaching conversation**, being confident that such silence happens frequently in challenging conversations and should be respected.

Pay close attention: While in a coaching conversation, you will certainly need to pay close attention to what the employee is telling you about the situation. **Pay even closer attention to all the nuances of tone and language that arise** while having the conversation so that you can pick up on clues that you might have otherwise missed because it is a phone conversation. One way to do this successfully is to **take notes in your conversation** – because you are virtual, it is unlikely that the employee will even know that you are writing anything down. (For this reason, you may not want to type your notes, but rather write them on paper so the employee does not hear the key strokes and get nervous or think you are distracted.) Carefully repeating some of the key phrases that the employee uses can help him or her to feel you are really listening to them, and it can also help you gain a better understanding of the issues at play.

Avoid distractions and interruptions: Do not attempt to multi-task during a coaching conversation. If you're checking email or looking over a report, it is likely that the **employee will be able to sense that you are distracted** and either take it personally or become even more resistant to any feedback you do provide. And even if the employee is oblivious to your multitasking, by not turning your focus completely on the task at hand you are unlikely to do either task well. The best approach is to **turn away from your work and only take notes to enhance your understanding of the current conversation**. It takes discipline to ignore your busy schedule, but it is likely to pay off in the end.

Next Steps

Activities: For additional information on remote coaching, please take a moment to review the job aid and attend the 'Remote Coaching' Discussion Group referenced below:

- [Remote Coaching Job Aid](#)

Coming Next: Responding to Resistance is challenging for even the most seasoned Managers and Supervisors and is the next topic in the series. It will offer strategies for constructively responding to resistance.